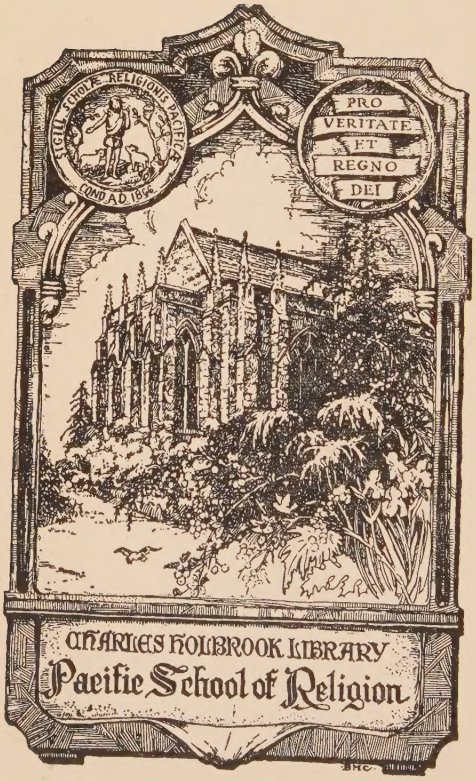
EARNEST WORDS

—FROM—

HELPFUL SERMONS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EARNEST WORDS

FROM

HELPFUL SERMONS.

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J. H. C. McLean

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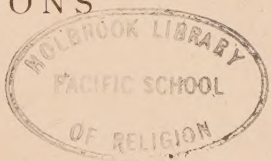

BY OUR PASTOR

REV. J. K. McLEAN, D. D.

PREPARED BY

THE LADIES' AID SOCIETY OF FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH
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EARNEST WORDS

FROM

HELPFUL SERMONS.

HE faithful and the patient not only *shall* inherit, they *do* inherit. God's ministries of love and rest come to them in the midst of their way. He opens springs in the wilderness.

Then let us arm ourselves with this mind of faith and patience. Let us make it the central thing among all our aims and aspirations *to keep trail;* to follow on, as God gives us grace in the steps of them who, through faith and patience, have inherited the promises.

Christian life is not a mere science of living; it is the art of living, too; it is the living, itself, the practice as well as the theory. It is not only to know what we ought to do and to be, but it is to be able under all circumstances to do and to be that.

Do not forget that He who says, "Come learn of Me," has a text-book to put into your hands.

There is an established order of sequence in all God's promises; we cannot get an inside blessing with an outside prayer, any more than we can unlock an inside door with an outside key.

We forget that duty can have no abstract existence; that all duty exists only in duties,—specific duties with reference to *this* and to *that*.

We want all the duties of a lifetime set up in a row and Light for the lot at one prayer!

Our prayers are often like creeping things, inching along. We need to wing them with gratitude. Then they shall make their way unfailingly and swiftly to the realms of light.

The impure man not only misses sight of God, but he is wanting in faculty for seeing God. If the impure soul were passed into heaven, it would see nothing of God there, any more than a blind man sees the stars when led out under the evening sky.

If any one of us could run his lines of life just to suit the ideal of what, as we look ahead, we think would be best for us, he would project a region of living something like our broad open valleys, where there is no swamp, and no mire, and only great fields of wheat grow.

But how such a life would dry up! What were the Sacramento Valley without the Sacramento River? And what were that river without the thousand deep tangles in which its streams are born?

I once saw in the bricks of a door-yard walk, deep prints made by tiny rain-drops and by a cat's feet, when the bricks were soft. Now, hail-storms beat upon the bricks, and men and cows walk over them, but leave no mark. While mind and soul are plastic is the period for impressions.

As it requires a poetic faculty to discern and appreciate poetical thought, as it needs musical faculty to discern music, so there would almost seem to be a distinct faculty called Pureness requisite for discerning God, the infinite Purity.

We would be glad to have our lives always under the sunlight. What men wish and pray for is that their way may run open and clear, unclouded, with no troubles, and no dark seasons, no swamps to beat through, no nights when the rain falls all night long. Prosperity is what men think of when they ask God to bless them,—unbroken success, without any disaster, or sickness, or trouble. But such a life would, in the long run, become a perfect Desert of Sahara.

More than half the reason why we do not enjoy more signally the joyful ministry of the Holy Ghost, lies in our treatment of his physical temple. A blameless body has much to do with the peace God gives. It is difficult to keep soul and spirit blameless, unless the body also be kept blameless.

If any man would find out what is the highest good for himself, out of all possible conditions in life,—considered as to the present only,—let him ascertain what is God's purpose in creating him; and in the working out of that purpose, he will find his own supreme blessing.

Tears need not bar us from God's harvest of joy. We shall do very little sowing, if we sow only in smiles. We must have more harvests than we can possibly put in during the few hours of sunshine. If we sow not in tears, we shall scarcely sow at all.

Contentment comes neither by culture, nor by wishing; it is a reconciliation with one's lot, growing out of an inward superiority to our surroundings.

It is not always at those times when we lay ourselves out to be sympathetic that we succeed best; not always on those marked occasions when we have prepared some suitable thing to say or provided some handsome thing to give. But quite as often, perhaps more often, it is the single, simple word of comfort dropped by the way that reaches the mark most surely, or the little kindly act done upon occasion. "A word fitly spoken"—the right word at the right moment—"how good it is!" An apple of gold presented in a basket of silver. An important part of all our education should be to make ourselves expert in discerning opportunity and hitting it on the wing.

God's word is the sword of the Spirit. A sword is but of little use to him who does not unsheath it. Now and then, he may batter down, an enemy therewith, but much more effective is the naked blade whose keen edge cuts. We must get the meaning of the word, the mind of the spirit. That is the sword unsheathed.

Some men have too much belief. Abraham believed God and went out at His word, seeking a city. We also believe God, but believe that he will bring the city to us.

Noah believed God and built the Ark. We also believe, and depend on God to build our ark for us.

There is nothing in which it is more natural, or more easy, or more common for us to deceive ourselves, than with regard to the amount and value of our personal piety. We estimate our piety, we do not measure it. Or, if we try to measure it, we bring it to standards of feeling, nearly always, seldom to standards of fact.

We measure by word, by tongue; not by deed and by truth. And so we impose upon ourselves.

Let Christianity show by a sanctifying, harmonious preservation and development of all the human powers, its right to be considered a divine culture, and all criticism, all assault, all so-called progress of thought in any direction, shall be powerless against it, but shall only maintain it. It shall appear a living fact, and facts convince.

In any case when preceptive Christianity and practical Christianity are at odds, the practical will carry the children. It is not so much what you say to the children, as it is the spirit of your life, as it is the character of your aims, the temper you exhibit, the ideas which possess you, the ends which you live for, that charge the atmosphere of your home.

Some believers treat the promises, as the hen, her eggs,—simply sit upon them, expecting them to hatch.

But God's promises are more like coins than like eggs. Invested, put to active, constant use, they bring us income. Merely sat on, they are only unfruitful promises to the end. The promises grow bright by using, dull by keeping.

For seeing God pureness of heart is indispensable. The soul needs both the seeing faculty and the seeing medium. Within windows sits the spiritual consciousness. In order to see God, those windows must be kept clear, as well as clean. Everything like opaqueness, not only, but whatsoever tends to obliqueness or distortion must be done away. To see the stars properly, greatest care must be taken with the telescopic lens. The medium of vision must be as perfect as the organ of vision. So without holiness no man shall see God.

I sometimes think that the greatest of all miracles which appeared in our Lord's ministry upon the earth, was the miracle of his patience with the slowness of his disciples.

Dogmatism by no means abides within theologic lines. Men's theories act upon them always like colored glasses, whether it be theory theologic, or theory scientific. Science stands keen-eyed for Law, but comes back from many a quest all ignorant of a Lawgiver.

Whatsoever church has life enough to make its giving abundant, principled, unfailing, will have life enough to make all its other activities vital and effective.

Our souls are fortresses beleaguered; they are cities under siege. The great life-work of every man is to defend this fortress; to restore those failing defences; to make and keep himself master, under God, of that citadel which is himself.

The right religious life founds itself on principle,—principle which runs out broad and goes down deep, like bed-rock: it grasps this strongly and holds to it inflexibly.

Underlying all other want and all other desire, God has established within every human spirit a hunger of the soul. That deep place of the human spirit is the place of the Shekinah: the place of God Himself. That hunger is the yearning Himself has ordained: and in ordaining it, He has ordained also that it shall never be appeased until the soul knows Him.

Let us believe that to every forest of trouble into which our way leads, there is another side. Not only a way in, but a way out as well. That the merciful God who brought us into the shadow, only intends us to pass through it, not to abide in it.

The heart of many and many a man is touched to finest issues of real Christian faith whose understanding remains, it may be, in darkness or in bondage.

Systematic giving dignifies all secular labor; even sanctifies it, and makes our daily toil a moral discipline.

In the Christian warfare we shall be successful in exact proportion as we are in earnest.

First sermon—1859.

True Christian zeal is not a thing to be kept in reserve for great achievements, but is such a constant temper of mind as leads its possessor, *whatsoever* his hands find to do, *that* to do with *all* his might.

First sermon—1859.

The individual soul must use the telescope of faith in the study of God's promises, as the astronomer uses his telescope: he must shut himself up with it through long silent hours; with all the noise and care of earth forgot, and there study the great flaming, planet-promises; and there, in that stillness, ask wisdom of the Teacher whose mission it is, to "take of the things of God and show them unto you."

The question with us is not so much of Christianity as a doctrine to our understanding, or a creed to our church, as of Jesus Christ, a divine fact to our souls.

Learn to weave a golden thread of content into a noble dissatisfaction.

Obtain and hold a clear vision of spiritual values, and cultivate a practical trust in God;—these will bring content.

The subject-matter of a man's thought becomes presently the food of his inner life, and this life grows like that upon which it is fed.

If there be on the blessed shore of Immortality one single cliff, one single hill-top on which, when we reach it, our feet may stand with any sense of home, by all means, let us look it out and cherish the sight of it, and grow familiar with it now. It will be at least one point to steer by, if, at any time, we are in danger of being swept away to sea.

It is not at our Bethels that God comes down to us; it is only at our Bethels that we wake up to God. We talk of our times of meeting God, of the day when God first came to us. We mean by it only the time when we came to our senses and saw God. He had been about us always; we only then began to see Him.

Our real successes come as the Kingdom of God comes, without observation. Neither can we say of them, 'lo, here,' or 'lo, there;' for, behold, they lie, as the Kingdom of God does, *within* us.

Our understanding of the Gospel of which we have been put in trust is, that it is to be applied to every interest and every relation of human life.

We accept the theory that God should control our life; that in everything we should seek His approval and turn as in an orbit about Him;—then, as a matter of fact, we go turning over and over just on the same old centre of self.

You cannot, in any way, be so efficient a co-worker with God, as by being a truth-planter.

Remember that you cannot, in the long run, have a good name without having that which the name stands for. If you wish to be thought good, it will be necessary for you to be good.

Men do not stumble by any lucky accident into goodness. They become good only through purposing, through determining, through resolving to be so. But if they fail with a purpose, what would they do without any purpose?

It is very doubtful, indeed, whether any very substantial moral good ever comes to us, but has its beginning in the shape of some good resolution. We certainly become no better than we purpose to become.

The poverty of Jesus is fitted to impress upon the world this truth, that the real worth of manhood is independent of circumstances.

It is not an easy thing for one who all his life has been living in sin and selfishness, although he be soundly converted, to turn right around, and begin upon the spot, to be and to act like Christ. Christ is the perfect model. No man reaches that model at first trying; he must keep after it, day after day, with all patience and perseverance, making many a failure but, through all, making progress.

It is no doubt wholesome for us,—now and then, at least,—to have the measure of our religious devotion and of our religious principle take a material form. The real strength of a cable can be ascertained only under strain. The weakest bar of iron can stand up if no weight is applied to it. So no man knows how much real religious principle he possesses, except under some practical material test.

Words are cheap. Professions cost little. Fervors are not difficult to attain. And so neither words nor professions, nor fervors are any final measure of a man's religion.

"To as many as receive Him!" How all national distinctions shrivel and disappear, how all social and class distinctions melt away, how all moral conditions, even, vanish before the charm of these potent words! They open the doorway of hope and of aspiration to universal humanity.

Let us say over to ourselves often and with ever reverent thankfulness the words, "to as many as." When we are looking upon the great dark fields of human degradation, human sin, and want, and woe, let us have these words ready at our hand. They are God's bow of promise, overarching the somber world-problem.

Do not almost all of us too much pervert the grand Bible Doctrine of prayer and the promises of God to hear prayer, into an arrangement by which God shall be induced to do as we will, rather than a means by which our will shall bend to His?

Salvation presupposes a condition out of which to be saved. No correct view of the gospel salvation can be had which does not look first at the condition of those to whom it comes.

However much life be cut short in years, death which brings manhood,—as in a righteous war,—brings gain. No such death is premature. For it is not the number of our years that makes up the story of our life. It is the breadth of our years, the loftiness of our years, the strength of our years, and their achievement. It is the stature of spirit to which they bring us, and the power of faith and courage they develop.

The fact stands in the clearest light, not only of Scripture but of all human observation and experience, that before every gate of good the human soul stands free,—free to enter, free to loiter, or free to go away. The greatest of all goods, therefore, stands but on a line with every other good: it awaits our reception.

No better proof of the existence of the spring away out of sight among the mountains can be had, than the flowing perennial brook which ripples at your feet and spreads life and verdure about you. So this brook, our Christian Sabbath, attests the spring, Christ's Resurrection, back among the hills of history.

In the very nature of things, child-religion must have its basis chiefly in feeling,—very much more than in conscience or in principle. Principle is a thing of growth; feeling is a main feeder, a main tributary to that growth. Feeling is native to a little child, principle is not. Principle is character, attainment, a moral disposition wrought out, hammered into shape. Feeling is the fire upon the forge in which disposition is made malleable.

I do not think any human words can over-magnify the unspeakable function of our human choice-power; or exaggerate the gravity of the responsibility which is laid upon it.

It does not make a home Christian to call it Christian; nor to have Christian mottoes upon the walls; atmosphere does not come from illuminated texts. The illuminated texts must be hung elsewhere than on the walls.

There may be a household with Christians in it,—with, possibly, only Christians in it,—which, nevertheless, is organized upon an essentially un-Christian basis and works upon almost anything else than a Christian plan.

Fullness of power in a piece of machinery implies right relation to the motive power; "fullness of God" implies right relation to God.

Immortality being assured, the soul stands face to face with the question of how she shall live. Eternity opening before her, at once is made apparent the unspeakable consequence of time. O my soul, thou shalt live! The eternal years of God are thine. But be thou then afraid! Take thy life reverently; fashion it prayerfully. Since immortality is thine, prepare, prepare for immortality!

With as much force as we are drawn toward the Future Life at all, are we drawn toward a future possessing large features of identity with our present. Not more strongly does the Divinity that stirs within us point out an hereafter, and intimate an Eternity to man, than it points to an hereafter in some sense substantial with our here, and intimates an Eternity in some sense at one with Time.

If one cannot keep his life clean, let him cease to babble about his heart being clean. Hearts decay long before lives show it.

If your ideas and aims and ends be material, do not wonder that your child should grow up material ; if your ideas and aims be selfish, do not be surprised to see your child pinched by them into selfishness : if your ideas and aims be frivolous and unworthy, do not wonder that your child grows up frivolous and unworthy. And if, on the other hand, your aims and ideas be generous and spiritual and lofty, you have best reason to hope that your child will grow up generous and spiritual and lofty.

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